

First record of Little Crake *Porzana parva* for Seychelles

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Première mention de la Marouette poussin *Porzana parva* pour les Seychelles. Une Marouette poussin *Porzana parva* immature était présente à Cousin, Seychelles, du 25 au 27 décembre 2004. Cette mention a été acceptée comme la première pour le pays par le Comité d'Homologation Seychellois.

On 25 December 2004 we noted a tiny rail in the small marsh on Cousin Island Nature Reserve. It was feeding frantically and paid little attention to our presence. Though repeatedly chased to the edge of the marsh by Common Moorhens *Gallinula chloropus*, it kept returning to forage in the centre. The marsh contained a few centimetres of rainwater and thus constituted suitable foraging habitat. Having watched the crake through binoculars for some time, we returned to the field station to get a camera, which permitted us to take photographs (Figs. 1–2). The bird remained in the marsh several days, repeatedly allowing good views but becoming a little shyer each time we looked for it. Three days after we found the bird, heavy rains hit Cousin Island, increasing the amount of water in the marsh. The deeper water probably made the habitat less suitable for the crake and we did not see it again. Photographs and a description were submitted to the Seychelles Bird Records Committee (SBRC).

Description

A tiny crake with dull-brown upperparts and wings marked with short blackish stripes. Long primary projection in folded wing (c.8 primary tips visible). Supercilium pale grey, extending from bill to behind eye, contrasting with brown crown and buff spot behind eye. Underparts pale grey with flanks and undertail slightly barred whitish. Iris red-brown. Short bill and long legs greenish.

The long primary projection and slight barring on the rear underparts identified the bird as a Little Crake *Porzana parva*. Baillon's Crake *P. pusilla*, with which confusion is most likely, has a short primary projection with rarely more than three primary tips visible, and obvious black-and-white barring on the flanks extending in front of the legs (Cramp & Simmons 1980, Taylor 1998). The red-brown iris is indicative of a first-winter, the irides being scarlet in adults. The absence of red at the base of the bill may have been due to malnutrition



Figures 1–2. Little Crake / Marouette poussin *Porzana parva*, Cousin Island, Seychelles, December 2004 (Cas Eikenaar)

or because this feature had not yet developed (juveniles lack red: Cramp & Simmons 1980, Taylor & van Perlo 1998).

Status and distribution

Little Crane breeds in southern and central Europe east to Kazakhstan and north-west China; its imperfectly known winter range includes the Mediterranean basin, sub-Saharan Africa (mainly in the east, south to Zambia) and Arabia to north-west India. Vagrants have been found on some remote islands, e.g. the Azores, Madeira and the Canaries (Cramp & Simmons 1980, Urban *et al.* 1986, Taylor 1996, Taylor & van Perlo 1998). Prior to our record, which has been accepted by the SBRC as the first for Seychelles, the species had never been recorded in the Indian Ocean islands.

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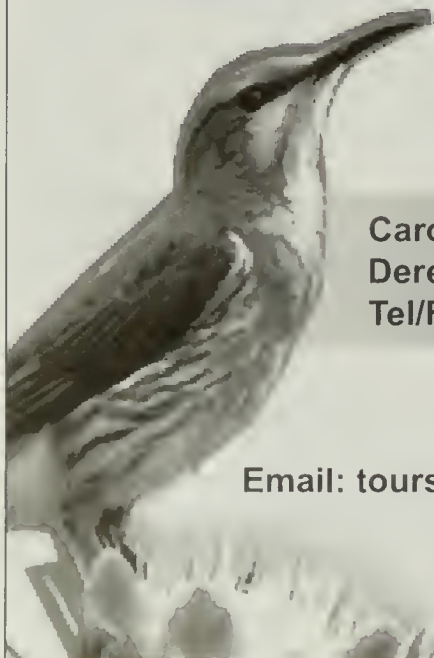
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